

IS
PRESIDENT MCKINLEY
WORTHY
OF A
SECOND TERM?

AN ADDRESS

BY
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IS PRESIDENT McKINLEY WORTHY OF A SECOND TERM?

BY GEORGE W. EDGETT, B. L.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS: Is it ever right to criticise, to censure, to arraign the President? You know, the old, imperial maxim was—"The king can do no wrong." This was once accepted as a necessary fiction of government. "*Vox populi, vox Dei*," is the same thing in another form, made for the use of republics instead of kings.

Both assumptions justify what is wrong, no less than what is right.

No person ought to write his country's history, who credits the divine right of kings and popular executives, or whose motto is: *my* government can do no wrong for which it ought to be assailed. He is like a lawyer, on one side of a cause, instead of being a reliable, impartial judge, able to render equal and exact justice to all parties, in relation to national disputes, or wars.

Orators and authors who use that sentiment to inspire historic coloring, to form public opinion, to inflame the spirit of war, to justify an error, or conceal a national wrong, are neither wise nor patriotic. Loyalty to that principle would have made the very existence of our republic impossible.

All nations have been improved to what they are in respect to freedom, by the force of protest, by the effort of minorities, by the struggles of brave men against the tyranny of selfish power.

How long, think you, would the spirit of a republic prevail here, if all the people were to relax their vigilance, and say,—no matter what they do, our rulers are right, and we must support their policy, defend their action, fill up their armies to engage in "criminal aggression," and make their iniquities our own?

Did the Earl of Chatham say that? Did Edmund Burke say that? Did Fox, Lord Camden, and Colonel Barré say that? Those noble, patriotic souls, and a multitude of others there in old England, protested against the action of king and ministry toward the

rebellious colonies. And in America—did John Hancock and Jefferson say that? Did Sam Adams, Patrick Henry, and George Washington say that, when they felt the infliction of a wrong by their own government? Argument, petition, protest, Lexington, Bunker Hill, and on to the end at Yorktown, was the order of their patriotic talk for justice, equality, liberty—for “government of the people, by the people, for the people”—such government as the Filipinos fought for, against this giant Republic, now placed in absolute hostility to the principles that gave it birth, now engaged in the usurpation of another people’s governmental right.

Protest, a hurricane of protest, is what these times most need.

Looking over the dash-board, down the steep mutations visible *in futuro*, to see where Jehu, or the devil drives to—any old passenger who has been long on the historic roads of life, must now feel the necessity of a mighty strong brake on the car of State.

If wisdom and learning were hereditary, or carried forward by reincarnation, we might hope for a time when “*vox populi, vox Dei*” will become a genuine truism in matters of war; but nature has provided no such forcible plan for the perpetuity of progress, or human elevation, and the spirits of wise men who speak in immortal books, fail to effect this noble purpose; so when we look back over the course of a century, to the wise political theory of Immanuel Kant’s essay of “Eternal Peace,” we find no end of wars—begun and carried on under false pretenses—for the sake of peace, for the good of man, for the love of God, or for such sad and sickening glory as “old glory” dishonored over the Island of Luzon.

One of the world’s greatest authors of laconic instruction from jurisprudential history, Baron de Montesquieu, in his work on “The Spirit of Laws,” made by twenty years of close, historic study, declares this: “It is contrary to the nature of things, that a democratical republic should conquer towns, or countries, which cannot enter into the sphere of its democracy. It is necessary that the conquered people should be capable of enjoying the privileges of sovereignty, as was settled in the very beginning among the Romans.

"If a democratical republic subdues a people in order to govern them as subjects, it exposes its own liberty."

And again he says: "There is still another inconvenience in conquests made by democracies: The government is always odious to the conquered states. It is apparently monarchial; but, in reality, it is more oppressive than monarchy, as the experience of all ages and countries evinces.

"The conquered people are in a melancholy situation: They neither enjoy the advantages of a republic, nor those of a monarchy." The truth of all this will appear as we go on.

Now it may be claimed, after the manner of discrediting the advice of Washington, that since Montesquieu wrote his deductions—over a hundred and fifty years ago—the world has been so changed in respect to the spirit of laws, customs, education, and motives of action, that lessons of experience drawn from the distant past, are now utterly worthless.

Is this true? Or because science has annihilated the old relations of time and space, and martial power, by steam, electricity, and modern enginery of war; and because the whole world may seem too small to give a colossal ambition space enough for farms, free trade, and the exercise of power, (while millions of acres are left unoccupied at home,) does it follow that the nature of men and governments is so altered, that the causes of self-destruction in the past, have no value now, as proof of what will happen to the future of our country?

In reply to this, let the fact of what has already happened to the imperial victim of our conquest, speak. Let the growing disregard of those just principles that made our greatness, tell us what is possible and probable, in the change of this republic to an empire.

When we review the official heads of militarism in America,—when we scan those journals, or those journalistic knights of the press, that were seemingly delighted to wallow in the gore of those former allies whom our commander-in-chief has made our enemies,—when we read the report that a noted senator—Depew of New York—declared his wish to send 300,000 soldiers, if necessary, to crush

those little people, fighting for their liberty,—when we hear the popular cry for war, on the brink of every national dispute, and see the instinctive action of the tiger, in place of human reason,—it makes us feel that we are not yet out of the wilderness, not yet free from the company of savages, lions, jackals, and birds of prey; not yet beyond all need of counsel from the past, not yet able to disprove the teachings of Montesquieu, not yet above the wisdom of a Washington.

We are taught by examples in every kind of government, that victory may be more ruinous to the victor than it is to the conquered; that success may prove a worse calamity than defeat. The Athenians lost their republican virtues, in corruption caused by victory over the Persians, in the Gulf of Salamis. The republic of Syracuse was ruined by its defeat of the Athenians.

Is it not probable that history will repeat itself in a reign of folly here, and that a far better, mightier people than Greeks, Romans, or Carthaginians, will go down as they did? Nay, more than this, is it not a fact, that we have already lost our national integrity, by presidential action in the Philippines—an ignominious fact, that the supreme principle of our republic has been subverted, by the bloody conquest of an alien people fighting for self-sovereignty?

King George, Lord North, Dr. Johnson,—laugh, ye Spirits laugh! to see the children of your old-time rebels, in a war more infamous than yours upon America!

In spite of constitutional safeguards, in spite of all philosophy, the plain truth is, that this nation is drifting, supinely drifting into the region of imperial despotism; and what some men now call the spirit of treason, was once called patriotism.

How does it sound in the ear of Justice, to couple treason with the name of George F. Hoar, whose patriotic nobility of manhood stands beside his coadjutor in office, as “Hyperion to a satyr;” whose name will live in history like that of William Pitt, who declared by his last effort in the house of Lords,—“If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms, never, never, never!” Tanta-

mount to this challenge of imperial right in the military rule of King George, has been the spirit of our noble Senator, in relation to the martial rule of President McKinley in the Philippines.

It would be well for the future of our country, if it had been true of the Filipinos, as Chatham said of America—"The conquest of English-America is an impossibility. You cannot, my lords, you cannot conquer America."

It would have been a happy, glorious day for this republic, when the treaty settlement with Spain was acted on by the Senate of United States, if a majority had been animated by the spirit of Edmund Burke, when he said of American freedom, in his address to the king—"It will be impossible long to resist the powerful and equitable arguments in favor of the freedom of these unhappy people, that are to be drawn from the principle of our own liberty. Attempts will be made, attempts have been made, to ridicule and to argue away this principle; and to inculcate into the minds of your people, other maxims of government and other grounds of obedience than those which have prevailed at and since the glorious Revolution. By degrees, these doctrines, by being convenient, may grow prevalent. The consequence is not certain; but a general change of principles rarely happens among a people, without leading to a change of government." And now mark these next words, as if they were addressed to President McKinley instead of King George.

"Sir, your throne" (your government) "cannot stand secure upon the principles of unconditional submission and passive obedience; on powers exercised without the concurrence of the people to be governed; on acts made in defiance of their prejudices and habits; on acquiescence procured by foreign troops, and secured by standing armies. These may possibly be the foundation of other thrones, they must be the subversion of yours."

If this was true of a monarchy like England, in relation to America, with still greater force does it apply to a republic like ours, in relation to the Filipinos: not only because we claim to have a government of greater freedom than England had, but

because those people had never been our subjects, never chose to become our subjects, and by no just law of human rights, from God or man, are they our subjects now. The first, the greatest, the all-supporting principle of our republican existence, is in the utmost peril.

Regardless, however, of our own great danger in America, it is argued for an imperial republic, that nothing is due from our national principles, to any outside people who are not citizens, but whom we propose to govern by force of arms, for their own good; and whom we propose to make citizens of when we choose, unless it suits the convenience of our imperial majesty, to follow a rule of treatment in every case of conquest, like that of the McEnery resolution of the Senate, which denies the intention to annex, or to citizenize the Philippine Islands, by virtue of our treaty with Spain.

This verifies every word we quoted from Montesquieu, as to the most unhappy condition of an inferior people conquered by a republic. They are not only denied the precious right to participate as citizens in making laws for themselves, but they endure the misery of knowing that other members of the republic are free, while they are not free.

Why, those whom Alexander the Great conquered, first by force of arms, and then by princely generosity in helping them to continue their own governments, though tributary to him, were in a situation far less melancholy than the Filipinos; both in respect to the assured privilege of home-rule, and the fear of losing their personal liberties, under a foreign, military government.

It is no exculpatory answer to all this, to say that we will give them a better government than they could make for themselves. This has been the crafty plea of personal and national cupidity, ever since the human race began. Spain used it—republics long since dead have used it—military dictators, kings, emperors, despots, have always used that plea, to justify the usurpation of a people's right.

These reflections broke off our line of remark for an imperial policy, just where we were about to say of any outside people who are neither territorial nor state citizens, but whom we propose to subdue and govern

against their will,—if such people refuse to obey the vice-royal power of army, navy, and governor, supported for their benefit, it becomes a religious, paternal, imperial duty, to overwhelm them by the might of our beneficent power. Here you have the extreme beauty of an absolute despotism. By this, you can begin to realize the imperial republic aimed at—the imperial republic we now have—in place of the old, democratical republic of our fathers.

And look you! Go beyond the ordinary infamy of practice on such a course of logic, and review the treatment of Aguinaldo and his brave associates. Did ever king prove more ungrateful to an ally, than to ignore him after victory, treat his envoys with contempt, secure the right of foreign rule he fought against, and then use that right to justify the subjugation of that ally?

Citizens of America, is it possible for you to sanction such dishonor, to which the President and his advisers have thus committed themselves? What are we to think about these men! Words fail to express the folly of their action! What does it mean,—imbecility, total want of honor, moral obliquity made by political ambition, the resistless force of a money-mad plutocracy, or is it the spirit of high treason, indirectly making war against the life of this republic, that we have to deal with?

Thank God for the faith we have in the final judgment of a noble people: The doom of their official life is sealed. Not all their patronage and orators; not all the millionaires of all the states, can win the heart and soul of the American people, to support a second term for such offenders. And when their epitaph is written, it will read—**HERE LIES THE ADMINISTRATION WHICH FIRST BEGAN UNDOING WHAT GEORGE WASHINGTON AND HIS COMPATRIOTS HAD DONE.**

If great prosperity, and high hopes of imperial glory, should make the people deaf to reason for a time, and so defeat this forecast of the next election; nevertheless, the truth of that epitaph will stand recorded on the page of history.

No doubt our rulers, in their blind infatuation, sought to advance the country's greatness. No doubt the mistake of their ambition was led to, by desire to

become great historic factors in making this nation a mighty world-power. From time immemorial, this same ambition has been the ruin of great men and their governments. We know the men too well to impugn their motives in relation to their own country.

And although I have been told that any person who will cheat and steal from other people for your benefit, will steal from you for their own benefit, I don't believe those men could go further, or do worse, than to capture a thousand islands for your supposed benefit, the acceptance of which, will bring you a more stupendous heritage of trouble, than ever yet befell a receiver of stolen goods.

And what is their apology for all this wrong inflicted upon strangers, inflicted on ourselves? In brief, the story runs like this: Forced by the people, or by a majority of their agents in Congress, to make war on Spain, *for the relief of human suffering*, they were drawn by quick and easy victory, by popular applause, by hope of harmless expansion, by the spirit of commerce, by the needs of trade, by the force of a great plutocracy whose only god is Mammon, by the desire to be near China, ready to engage in other wars, and by the supposed wish of God to have them plant all *other people* on the proper road to heaven,—on and on, until they came to the demand for great possessions in the China Sea.

If this demand, this purchase made by force at their own price, had been made in order to turn that country over to its own people, reserving some paternal rights, under bonds of mutual obligation, gratitude and friendship,—the whole world would shout us, bravo! to the American Democracy! where now we have the world's contempt, the hatred of a conquered race, the dangers of a European Power.

Mr. President, what have you given us to justify this backward step into the system of imperial rule we fought against in '76? What have you given us for all this danger, obloquy and shame?

In place of honorable pride in the title of Exemplar for all other governments, we now endure the burden of a national disgrace, the violation of our principles, the prospect of a never ending increase of mighty armaments, to cover distant seas and fortify the land.

You *have* given us indubitable proof of this:

"The white man's burden" is the white man's greed:
Ambition, av'rice, conquest, empire, fame—
The load that Caesar and Napoleon bore,
And countless warriors that have gone before,
With pretext of humanity to man,
Is still the burden of the tales we read.
Of war on people fighting for the same
Great boon ours fought for, in the days of yore,
When the Republic stood for something grand,
And not for conquest of a foreign land.

In the name of those illustrious dead whose wisdom you ignore, the voice of Justice calls you, President McKinley, to the bar of human reason, to answer for that desolation, bloodshed, misery and death, caused by the formulation and execution of your policy in relation to the Philippine Islands.

If Congress had been made accessory before and after the fact, in all the uses of your power; had all the people made imperative demand that you should use their armies in that wicked work; nevertheless, your responsibility and complicity would still remain, because you had a last resort, a moral right, which brave men sometimes use, when vetoes, opposition, arguments all fail, against the execution of a wrong—the right to say, I resign my office—I will not be implicated in the gross barbarity of murderous war against that people wishing to be free.

Whether your navy did, or did not salute the Filipino flag, before you had decided to destroy what that emblem represented; whether Dewey did, or did not promise Aguinaldo independence, or give him such a hope, without authority from you; and whether Howard W. Bray and all the other witnesses in these affairs, except your partisans, are liars or not,—are questions not material to the case before us, except so far as they relate to infidelity and change of principle, which might signify unfitness for the office of President.

Another matter, of more certain import in the process of anti-republican evolution, is that imperial proclamation made one month before the Filipino war began, in these words: "The military government heretofore maintained by the United States in the city, harbor, and bay of Manila, is to be extended with all possible dispatch to the whole of the ceded territory."

This meant for all the people of that territory,

unconditional submission to your military rule, or subjection by the force of arms. Was not this insidious order equivalent to a declaration of war, or did you think the Filipinos fought in our behalf, to secure a state of vassalage under a new empire?

What made that desire to occupy with all possible haste, a territory that was already in the possession of a friendly people—a territory not then accepted by our acceptance of your treaty—a territory that was not yet ours by the assumed right of a ratified treaty transfer? Was it caused by an imperial fear, that the Filipino government, which was already formed—already five months old—might try to enforce the people's right to be consulted, for their concurrence in the nature of your prospective government?

No wonder they were astounded, dismayed, and full of wrath, to find their high hope of your assistance into national freedom, thus rudely blasted.

Then came the retaliation of their soldiers, for killing one of their comrades by a sentry, and the fight began. Wherever the fault might be, for that collision; when Aguinaldo sent his regrets for the unhappy incident, asking General Otis to stop the fighting, why did he reply—as General McReeve has told us—"the fighting having once begun, must go on to the grim end"? No matter why, the pretext was a good one, and the fight went on.

A myriad of those little aliens have succumbed to your authority, in the obedience of death. They mistook themselves for patriots; but they yielded to the ethics of your shot and shell. They are better now; good, passive subjects, who will not oppose the Empire any more.

And are there some yet living who refuse to acquiesce—some brigands, robbers, murderers, to be hunted down, and killed? Is the work not quite complete?

I wonder, was it well, and nobly done, to liberate from Spanish rule, and then, to pacify a people so? Did the glory of our arms, the rights of man, the dignity of State require, that we should so eclipse old Spain, in the rapid conquest of an alien colony? Are you proud of the accomplishment, and worthy of a second term?

Time was, when Jesus wept for the wickedness of man; but now, no tear of pity falls, for the anguish of an alien race. The ravages of war have made a people mourn, filled the hearts of mothers, wives and children with despair, and yet we feel not, care not, nay, we *must* not weep for their calamity, because you say we did our duty toward them, and they brought it on themselves.

I wonder, is it not a duty, and a happy thing to do, to favor friendship with a right to live! to enforce the rights of man, for those who lack the power! to help build up a government of men made free, and so remain a pattern for the world! Or is it better, to inspire a nation with illimitable greed, to create hatred in the place of love, to rob ambition of a noble aim, to strike dead with agony, the new-born joy of liberty, that has lived a little while, in the sunshine of your smiles?

Tell me, ye patriots of America! On which side stands the lesson that our grandsires taught, in all the charters of our liberty; in bloody footprints on the snow at Valley Forge! in words of crimson on the map of war for liberty or death! in lines of principle that made A WORLD-POWER! *greater* than all the imperial empires in the world have ever wielded by the force of arms!

That grand embodiment of right that made our might sweep round the globe in rational enforcement of concessions to religion, education, law, equality, free-thought, invention, commerce,—was indeed a WORLD-POWER; mightier in the fields of peace, than armies in the field of war; mightier without possessions gained by crushing liberty, than with all the world so held in vassalage, subjected to our military force.

Tell me then; lives there a man on earth, worthy to be President of these United States, who repudiates that lesson—who abandons equity—who supports the ignominious assumption of a Spanish right by purchase, to slaughter an alien people who opposed our arbitrary rule, within possessions they had won from Spain, with our consent, and governed for themselves?

Do you say they had not won—did not govern—had no sovereignty when Spain sold out? Look at the great army it required to destroy the people's government! Ten, twenty, thirty, sixty thousand of our brave

soldiers sent there, tell the story better than my words can do it. Look at the established fact that as early as on August 6, 1898, the Filipino government was in operation and control, without our protest, in fifteen provinces, and on the entire coast of Manila bay, except the city of Manila. At that time, they issued an address to foreign governments, asking for the recognition of their independence. That was over four months before the Spanish-American treaty was signed in Paris on December 10, and six months before our Senate ratified the treaty on February 6, 1899.

Such facts as these, together with a subsequent completion of victory over Spanish power, in all parts of their country, before we bought Spain out, made the Filipino people stand, in respect to sovereignty, just where the patriots of America stood after the battle of Yorktown.

We see by this, that both in equity and by international law, we have a worthless title to Spanish dominion which did not exist when bought—a worthless title to the right of war for such dominion, against the people who had thrown it off.

What will the verdict be? Will it sanction the continuance of a monstrous wrong, or will it say—we have resolved to try another man for President?

